Daily Abiding in Christ

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http://www.wordoflifefellowship.com/daily-abiding-in-christ.html

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Introduction

The two prophetic "words" in this booklet are reprints from previous publications. I have chosen to place them together here because of the many comments I have received over the past several years of their helpfulness to the readers. I believe more have been helped in a personal, spiritual way by these two than by anything else I have published. They also complement one another, as they present the positive and negative aspects of our relation to the Lord: learning to ABIDE in Him, rather than STRIVE with Him. The comments following the prophetic message "Striving with the Lord" are also a reprint. To this I have added some new thoughts in the short article: "God's Work of Art in Us." The last article in the booklet, "Learning to Abide" is also new, not having been printed before. If you will read and meditate much on the truths presented herein, with an honest desire to come into a more meaningful and fulfilling relation to Jesus Christ, as Savior and Lord, I believe your life will take on a new dimension in both faith and fruitfulness. It is sent to you with this sincere hope! (by J. Leland Earls)

My father's ministry (spoken and written) has been a blessing for many people for many years. This material and others by Word of Life Fellowship are sent out or posted free of charge. This writing ministry is sustained by free-will offerings only. (We are incorporated as a non-profit organization in the state of Oregon under the name "Word of Life Fellowship" and offerings are tax-deductible). Your interest and "fellowship" in the outreach of this work will be greatly appreciated. (by Kevin W. Earls)

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Striving with the Lord

"Hearken to my voice my children. Must I continue to strive with you? Will you not enter into my rest? Will you not trust me to do what you cannot do yourself? Will you not look to me and confess your dependency on me in everything? Have I not said that I would do the work? Do you think that you can add to that which I have done? Are not my works finished from the foundation of the world? Are you not ready and willing to be in my hands the clay which the Potter would mold? Why do you continue to strive with me and make me to be altogether as one of you – without power and ability to accomplish my purpose?

I say to you; the day has come for self-strife to cease. Only acknowledge your sins and let me remedy that which needs to be changed. Do you think by some means or power of your own you can make yourself perfect in my sight? Have I not sworn that I will do it by myself alone? What

do you think you can add to my work? You would only contaminate that which I am doing. Do not make provision for your own fleshly striving. Cease to do that which only mars the clay in the Potter's hand, so that He must fashion anew that which He is making. Only seek my face, and cast yourself completely on me, so that I can do the work and fashion you according to my eternal purpose.

Mark well my words and give heed to my admonitions, for as you strive with me, so must I strive with you, and nothing is accomplished. Cease from your own striving and acknowledge my way. Seek my paths and forsake your own. Make me your guide and stay. Lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge me and I will make your path straight before you. I will put a hedge about you and protect you from Satan's wiles. Only acknowledge me and know for a truth that in me there is perfect peace and harmony.

When you strive, you are playing a discordant note which hinders the harmony which I would bring into your innermost being. Why do you make the way difficult when it could be easy? Have I not said, "my yoke is easy, and my burden is light?" Can your flesh add anything to what I am doing? Will you not trust me completely? Why do you not forsake your ways and heed my ways? Will you not confess with your mouth that I am all that you need, and that I am your sufficiency? Why will you make a mockery of my word by striving in your own strength as if you could add one whit to what I am able to accomplish by my mighty hand and power? Only acknowledge your evil ways; turn from your self-will and accept my way.

Confess with your mouth your own inadequacy and seek me. Spend much time in secret seeking my face. For the burden that I will impart to you is not the burden of striving with yourself and with me, but the burden of surrender and yielding, and confession of your dependency upon me. Then will I have you arise and go forth – not to confess your own inadequacy but to confess my strength and power. For as you do confess, so shall it be established to you. First, to acknowledge and confess your own sins and the weakness of your own self, and then to accept my cleansing and forgiveness. Confess that I have wrought a cleansing work in your innermost being by my Spirit, and then arise to confess my all-sufficient power and enablement; for as you confess so shall it be unto you. Speak the word of faith and it shall be power to you. For why will you walk in the weakness of your own flesh when you can walk in my power? Says the Lord.

Mark not the days that are past, neither the failures therein, for I turn my face from your past to your future; and take up the scepter of my divine appointment for you and number the days that are ahead. Not in anticipation of trouble or of fear or of ease to yourself, but of faith and strength, and of accomplishment through my mighty power. If you should stumble, am I not there to pick you up? Will you then strive with me as if I am not sufficient to raise you and set you on the path again? Don't break yourself upon the rock of my indignation by stumbling at my Word and making yourself a reproach to yourself and to those about you by walking with downcast heart, as if I were unable to right that which has gone wrong. Only acknowledge the evil of your ways and turn from them; confess your faith in me and surely, I will redeem you from every folly and will plant your feet more firmly upon the rock. I will lead you through the barren places, and will refresh your soul, and will lead you to the fountain of waters refreshing from the throne of my being.

Take heed to yourself and to my Word that you stumble not again, but make me the constant focus of your attention and praise, fixing your gaze steadfastly upon me, looking neither this way nor that, blinding your gaze to that which would draw you away, and making me the center of your attention. Stay your mind and heart upon me, that I might renew you in the spirit of your mind, transforming you through the channel of your mind as a wind blows through a channel, and as a whirlwind follows a path to uproot and destroy that which is in its path. Even so, would I uproot through the channel of your mind, dedicated and focused upon me with ever increasing attention and devotion, thinking my thoughts after me as I place them here through my Word and my Spirit, as you attune yourself to me and seek to dwell on me in my own realm where I am seated at the right hand of my Father.

Set your affections upon me; love me with your whole being; let my praises be in your

mouth and in your heart. Confess me before men; talk of me in all your ways; speak of me as you walk before me in love and adoration so that others may know of your devotion to me. Even so shall I transform your ways and make you a shining vessel to the praise of my glory.

Even so shall you not be downcast and in despair because of your ways, but you shall turn unto me in confidence and in assurance, knowing that in me there is abundance of strength. Know that in that moment you cease your own striving and yield unto me in perfect attunement to my Spirit and my way, I will begin to blow upon you; and in the channel of your perfectly attuned mind and heart, even as out of a whirlwind which follows a path that I set, so will I uproot out of your innermost being that which is not of my planting. I will uproot it in my righteous indignation and fury; and even as you continue to set your mind and affections upon me, and seek me diligently in my Word, so will I plant that which is pleasing in my sight, and I will make you a well-watered and fragrant garden which I shall plant in truth and holiness. And many shall enjoy the fragrance that comes from you, as I make you to abound in beautiful flowers of my planting, says the Lord.

Do you ask how this can be, says the Lord? Am I not your Keeper? Am I not unlimited in my power to accomplish if you will be surrendered completely and look not to your own ways, your own failures, and your own strivings? For why will you look down when you can look up? Why will you look within when you can look to me, even into the very depths of my being and there behold the beauty of my glory, and partake of that which I am able to impart, to make you a glorious vessel for me?

For a moment only, I would have you look within that you might see the grossness of your own being and the inadequacy of your own flesh, confessing your sins to me; and then turn to me with your whole heart that I might lift you into the heavenly spheres of my grace and glory, lifting you out of the mire of your own reflection and condemnation into the glory of my immutable purpose for you, letting the light of my glory envelop you and uplift you and pervade your very being, to transform you and make you into that which shall transcend the very glory of the stars which I have made and set each in its own place.

So, look unto me, my children, and heed my words. Look unto me and let me do that which only my hand and power can do. Strive no more in yourself. Let me bring you into that rest prepared for those I love. For even now would I give you rest from all that which troubles you and bears you down; and I would lift you up, says the Lord." (End of Prophetic word).

After receiving the above "word" the Lord began to deal with me concerning the various ways in which we "strive" with Him. In Isaiah 45:9, we read: "Woe to him who <u>strives</u> with his Maker. . . Shall the clay say to him who forms it, 'What are you making?' or shall your handiwork say, 'He has no hands?'" The word "strive" here means to "contend, argue, accuse or plead." Even without fully realizing it we are many times inwardly "contending" with the Lord concerning the various circumstances of our lives. And at times we are very consciously and vehemently "striving" with the Lord because of His dealings with us. I would suggest the following ways we "strive" with God.

To begin with, we strive with God when we question His destiny for us in placing us in the **particular circumstances** He has. God is the great **placer** and He has determined the <u>time</u> and <u>place</u> in history when we are born, the race and country we will be born in, the family, our sex, our physical characteristics, natural endowments, etc. **None** of these things have we anything to do with. They are all determined ahead of time by an **all-wise** heavenly Father who knows exactly where and when and under what circumstances He wants to **place** us. Yet many times we question God and "contend" with Him concerning the wisdom of "our lot." We tend to impute injustice to God because of what we are and where we are.

I believe there are two factors which have entered into God's choice for each of us. First, our "lot" and circumstances are chosen because of the **particular experiences** God knows we **will need** to learn certain lessons. Since all of us are **different**, we need different circumstances and experiences to **speak** to us, for God **speaks** and **teaches through the parabolic experiences of our lives.** Nothing ever just "happens" – everything is designed to "get through" to us in one

way or another. And **only God** has the "foreknowledge" to determine the "how's" and "when's" and "where's" of our individual lives. Such "foreknowledge" of God in no way interferes with our own "free-will" and choice. We can resist God's dealings with us in our circumstances of life and go our way to ruin and destruction. Or we can submit and learn and yield – finding His salvation and His purpose for our life. God said to Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you." (Jer. 1:5). Even so does God "know" each one of us before we are ever born and picks out the time and the circumstances for our earthly pilgrimage. Read all of Psalm 139 for a description of God's "foreknowledge" of us and all our ways. In Ps. 139:15-16 we read: "my frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them."

The second factor which determines our "lot" is the particular purpose which God sees that we can fulfill in His overall PLAN. In Isa. 46:10 we read that God declares "the end from the beginning." It is such "foreknowledge" that enables Him to predetermine the particulars and forecast the success of **His whole plan**, and this without any chance of miscarriage or failure. He **knows in advance** what each individual will do in every circumstance and thus it is simply a matter of **placement** for the proper "effects" to be brought about. It is this "foreknowledge" that enables Him to "counter" and even to **use** all the devices of man, even the wicked, to **implement His own plan**. Even Satan is being so "USED" to further the purposes of God. But since God in His "foreknowledge" can so use even the wicked, this in no way exonerates them from their wickedness. As Paul argues in his letter to the Romans, the fact that man's sin serves to **magnify** the goodness and faithfulness of God in no way provides an excuse to sin "that grace may abound." God is absolutely **just** and will deal with each man according to his own ways wrought out in time and experience, even though He knows in advance what each will do. God cannot very well deal with man according to what He **knows** he will do, but rather what He has factually done.

We are all **placed** to fulfill a particular purpose in God's over-all plan. Even the "wicked" are so placed. This is brought out in Romans 9:11-16 concerning Esau and Jacob. ("for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), it was said to her, 'The older shall serve the younger.' As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.' What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not!" God did not **arbitrarily** determine what Jacob and Esau would be. He simply **foreknew** what each would be and do under particular circumstances. Therefore, He PLACED THEM in these circumstances that THAT which would be brought out in each of their lives WOULD FULFILL A CERTAIN PORTION OF HIS PLAN. You will notice the choice of words in connection with Jacob and Esau in this passage: "purpose," "election," "calling," none of which have anything to do with personal salvation, but with the PLACING OF GOD TO FULFILL HIS PURPOSE.

So further in Rom. 9:17-21 we have the illustration of Pharaoh to whom God says: "For this very **purpose** I have raised you up, that I may show my power in you, and that my name may be declared in all the earth. Therefore, He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens." God simply PLACED Pharaoh in the circumstances where the condition of his heart **would be manifest**, therefore God in his placement and dealings with Pharaoh could be said to "harden his heart."

God foreknew what a "Pharaoh" would do, but He also foreknew what a "Jeremiah" would do, so He says of Jeremiah: "Before you were born, I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations." (Jer. 1:5). Even so does God "place" each one of us, that each of us might fulfill a portion of His plan. Shall we then impute injustice to God? Shall we "contend" and "strive" with Him concerning the "lot" He has chosen for us in His INFINITE WISDOM and His FOREKNOWLEDGE OF US. Even as Paul says: "You will say to me then, 'Why does He still **find fault**? For who has resisted His will?' But indeed, O man, **who are you** to **reply against God**? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, 'Why have you made me like this?'" (Rom. 9:19-20). Let's not "strive" with God but REST and REJOICE in that He has placed us WHERE He wants us

and "made" us just the way He wants FOR OUR OWN ULTIMATE GOOD as well as for the FULFILLMENT OF HIS PURPOSE.

We also "strive" with God when we question His dealings with us in the things He allows to happen to us. Again, we tend to feel that God is not being "fair" with us. Certainly, we haven't done anything to "deserve" such "severe" treatment. Such was the case of Job. He wanted to "argue his case with God." (Job 13:3) He became embittered in his soul (Job 10:1). He was "striving" with God. Even as Elihu says: "Why do you strive against Him? For He gives no account of any of His matters." Should we "strive" with God just because we do not understand? Are we stupid enough to require that God give an answer to everything? Are we not to TRUST Him and know that His WAYS ARE EQUAL (just). (Ezek. 18:29). How easy it is for us to find God's dealings with us, which are designed to PROVE us, an occasion for stumbling, and fight (strive) against the very things that will MAKE US WHAT God wants us to be. The futility of this is spoken of in the prophecy: "When you strive with me, then I must strive with you and nothing is accomplished."

Many times, we mistakenly feel that God is "punishing" us for something. Certainly, much that we "suffer" can be the result of our own folly and is simply the consequence of our own doings (as cause and effect – sowing and reaping). But IN TYPE God shows us by His dealings with the Israelites in the WILDERNESS (bespeaking our journey in the "wilderness" of this world) that He deals with us in certain ways to TEST us and PROVE us. A study of the 8th chapter of Deuteronomy makes this clear: "And you shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna. . . that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord. . . that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do you good in the end." (Deut. 8:2-3, 16). God put them in many circumstances which TRIED their faith severely, where it appeared that He had forsaken them, where it appeared that there was no way out, and where they were in desperate need. WHY? Was He trying to "punish" them? NO, a thousand times NO! He was providing occasions for their PROVING, to show them what was in their hearts, and to let them know what they would do and how they would stand up under certain conditions of testing; that they might LEARN to TRUST and SUBMIT and CHANGE their ways. God does not need to PROVE us that He might know what we will do, but that WE MIGHT KNOW, for only as we know our strengths and weaknesses can we OVERCOME and gain the VICTORY through the power of God.

But in those very conditions that the Lord would PROVE the people of Israel, they would "strive" with Him, not realizing that it was necessary for their good, for their spiritual development, and for their preparation for that for which He had chosen them. In Numbers, chapter 20, we read of one such instance when the people found themselves without water and immediately they began to "strive" with God with questionings, complaining and murmurings. In Numbers 20:13 we read: "This was the water of Meribah; because the children of Israel contended (strove) with the Lord." "Meribah" means strife. Listen to their "strivings" as follows: "If only we had died when our brethren died before the Lord! Why have you brought up the assembly of the Lord into this wilderness, that we and our animals should die here? And why have you made us come up out of Egypt, to bring us to this evil place?" "If only" and "Why?" are words which we use when we "strive" with the Lord in the midst of His proving. On this particular occasion, Moses became angered and struck the rock twice, instead of speaking to the rock as God had commanded him (Num. 20:8-11). The rock had been "struck" (smitten) by Moses 40 years earlier just after they came out of Egypt when they were camped at Rephidim as recorded in Ex. 17. Since the "rock" was a TYPE of Jesus (1 Cor. 10:4), it was to be "smitten" only ONCE, for only ONCE was He "smitten" (crucified) for us. Thus, when we "strive" with the Lord, we are fulfilling the TYPICAL action of Moses when he "smote" the rock CONTRARY to the will of the Lord. It was a "soulish" action – not an obedience to the command of the Lord. It was brought on by the irritation of the circumstances and the "anger" of the moment. Even so, when we "strive" with the Lord under the pressure of testing circumstances, we in effect "smite" the rock (Jesus) and are in a sense

"crucifying" Christ afresh and putting him to an open shame. (Heb. 6:6) We are instead to "speak" to the ROCK (Jesus) words of faith and praise even in the midst of the most trying circumstances.

A number of other ways could be mentioned in which we "strive" with God. But since this article is getting rather lengthy, we will mention only two more, and these only briefly, because most of the prophetic word which we began with deals with these two. Study again this "word" carefully concerning our "striving" with God by (1) trying to do in the strength of our own flesh what only the Lord can do by the power of His Spirit, and (2) becoming discouraged and disheartened, walking in a spirit of condemnation and defeat.

So often we make the mistake of the Galatian Christians of having "begun in the Spirit" and then trying to be made perfect "in the flesh." (Gal, 3:3). We make the Christian life a matter of struggling, striving, working, instead of yielding, surrendering and trusting. We are in effect contending that He is not sufficient to finish what He has begun (Phil. 1:6) – that we must add our "efforts" to what He is doing. We fail to "cease from our own works" and enter into the REST which He has prepared for us. There are three areas in which we enter into His Rest. In our Salvation, which is HIS WORK FOR US; in our sanctification, which is HIS WORK IN US; and in our Service, which is HIS WORK THROUGH US. It is ALL His work by His Spirit. The formula for success is given in the prophecy in these words: "Why will you make a mockery of my word by striving in your own strength as if you could add one whit to what I am able to accomplish by my mighty hand and power? Only acknowledge your evil ways, turn from your self-will and accept my way. Confess with your mouth your own inadequacy and seek me. Spend much time in secret seeking my face. For the burden that I will impart to you is not the burden of striving with yourself and with me, but the burden of surrender and yielding, and confession of your dependency upon me. Then will I have you arise and go forth, not to confess your own inadequacy but to confess my strength and power. For as you confess, so shall it be established to you."

Again we "strive" with the Lord when we become discouraged and disheartened. We are inwardly "contending" that His Word is not true and that His Spirit is not the spirit of peace and joy and victory. We know that the "truth shall make us free." (John 8:32). And the "truth" is that the Spirit of the Lord is not a spirit of condemnation, defeat and discouragement. It is when we begin to accept the accusations and lies of the ENEMY (Satan) that we become imbued with this kind of spirit. And it is when we TURN WITHIN and become involved in constant "introspection" that the enemy is able to "outwit" us and overwhelm us and get our minds bogged down in the "mire" of condemnation and defeat. We need to "look away" to Jesus. "Set your affections on things above, not on things of the earth." (Col. 3:2). As the prophecy says: "Set your affections upon me; love me with your whole being; let my praises be in your mouth and in your heart. Confess me before men; talk of me in all your ways; speak of me as you walk before me in love and adoration." "Why will you look within when you can look to me, even into the very depths of my being and there behold the beauty of my glory, and partake of that which I am able to impart?"

God's "Work of Art" in Us

I believe the Lord would have me add just a little to the preceding prophetic word and article. We will always tend to be "striving" with the Lord until we come to the place where we are fully convinced that the Lord knows what is best for us. "Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, 'Why have you made me like this?'" (Rom. 9:20) Paul speaks of those whom God has saved as "vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory" (Rom 9:23). God is the "Master artisan", molding and shaping each one of us as a particular "work of art" to be "placed on display" for the praise of His glory. We can admire a particular work of art for its beauty, but our praise goes to the artist himself, for it is the work of his hands. Recently I heard a speaker give this illustration. When an artist puts his paintings on display, he wants just the right frame for each picture. Those admiring the paintings pay little or no attention to the frames, yet the "right frame" for each picture is important. The speaker went on to say that our physical body is the "frame" for

the work of art the Lord is producing within us. It is the "beauty" of the inner personality and character that God wants others to see, but for each work of art He has chosen the "frame" that seems best to Him. Yet so many are hindered in their relationship to God because of resentments they carry through the years; some of which stem from a continuing unwillingness to accept themselves (or the physical "frame" which God has given them). In this rejection of self, they are actually (whether consciously or unconsciously) resisting God and His purpose in their lives. And because of this, God is unable to develop the inner character and beauty which He desires within them.

The real "work of art" is what the Lord is doing and developing within us. I find that when I meet a person whose inner qualities shine through and I can see the "beauty" that they are allowing God to develop within, my attention is not focused on the "frame" of the physical body and its characteristics. I am aware of the real person within that "frame" and the developing "work of art" that God is "painting" or "molding". But when a person is self-conscious and rejecting of himself, feeling that God has not been fair, and carrying resentments because of what he (or she) sees reflected in the mirror of their outer "frame", then such negative feelings are projected to others, and one tends to be more aware of the "frame" of that person, because that is what they are conscious of and inadvertently calling attention to. Also because of the lack of real inner beauty and qualities shining through to "capture" attention, the "frame" stands out instead of fading into the background. Those who have such a negative "self-image", not being willing to accept themselves as God made them, tend to try to compensate for this by various means, trying to get the approval of others through various outward "tactics" which only tend to make them more unacceptable, instead of letting the Lord develop the inner beauty which will cause others to delight in "what God hath wrought".

Paul says in Eph. 2:10 that "we are His (God's) workmanship". He is the Potter and we are the clay, or He is the Designer and Artist and we are the canvas. And this workmanship began in the foreordained counsels of God, as He determined in His infinite wisdom the time and place for our birth (also our parentage, circumstances, environment, etc.) and the "frame" for the beautiful work of art He has purposed that we become. "Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book, they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them." (Ps. 139:16, see verses 14-17) But the KEY to the "finished product" is Jesus Christ, accepting Him and letting Him do His work in us. "Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ. . . for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure." (Phil. 1:6, 2:13)

In Isa. 29:16, God accuses Israel of getting things "upside down" in their relation to God: "Surely you have things turned around! Shall the potter be esteemed as the clay; for shall the thing made say of him who made it, 'He did not make me'? Or shall the thing formed say of him who formed it, 'He has no understanding'?" But He sees a time of change when many would accept His will and purpose for them, and He declares of Israel: "But when he sees his children (walking in ways of piety and virtue) the work of my hands in his midst, they will hallow my name; they will hallow the Holy One of Jacob, and fear the God of Israel. These also who erred in spirit will come to understanding, and those who murmured (discontentedly) will learn doctrine" (Isa. 29:23-24). How God longs to put on display the "works of His hands", and He declares by the prophet: "Also your people shall all be righteous. . the work of my hands, that I may be glorified" (Isa. 60:2), and of this people he says: "You shall also be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God" (Isa. 62:3).

So let us stop striving with the Lord, and start thanking Him for His workmanship in us so far. We realize that His "work of art" in us is far from finished. The "canvas" of our inner lives shows much evidence of our own resistance to the Lord's design. But let us ask His forgiveness, and yield ourselves to His will, trusting Him to gently and patiently continue His work in us, so that in time we shall be unto "the praise of His glory" (Eph. 1:12). In Gen. 6:3, God declares: "my Spirit shall not strive with man forever." It is necessary for God to "strive" only when there is resistance to His will. Otherwise He is "at rest" even though working. "Rest" does not mean

inactivity. It is a state or condition within the mind and heart. Consider Adam in the beginning. In the garden there was no "striving". Adam was enjoying God's "rest", even though he was busy working together with God (Gen. 2:15, 19-20); and God was "at rest" because there was no sin or disobedience to His will. But this rest was interrupted when Adam and Eve decided to take things into their own hands and act on their own apart from God. In their fallen condition Adam and Eve began to partake of unrest within themselves, for this is the chief characteristic of man who is alienated from God and out of His will. "There is no peace (rest), says my God, for the wicked" (Isa. 57:21) Also, when sin began, God's rest was ended and He had to begin to "strive" with man to bring him back into the paths of rectitude and submission to His will. But God said, "my spirit will not always strive with man;" in other words there comes a time when man becomes so set in His rebellious ways that God "gives him up" (Rom. 1:28) to his own devices, as a vessel or "marred" work of art that "cannot be made whole" (Jer. 19:11).

Read carefully the 18th and 19th chapters of Jeremiah. In chap. 18, God presents a picture of a vessel of clay that was marred in the potter's hand, but which was remolded into another vessel, "as it pleased the potter to make it." The word then comes to Jeremiah from God: "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does? says the Lord. Look, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel!" (18:6) But in chap. 19, Jeremiah is commanded to take a clay vessel and go to the valley of Hinnom and there break the vessel in the sight of the people, to signify that the Lord would "break this people. . . as one breaks a potter's vessel, which cannot be made whole again" (19:11). Ah, beloved, how awful to think that God has to give up on some of His "works of art" – to be destroyed in "Gehenna" (Greek for the "valley of Hinnom" and translated "Hell" in Mt. 10:28. Also called the "lake of fire" in Rev. 20:10, 14-15). But God be praised, for though sin has marred us as vessels, the glorious!! news of the gospel is that through Christ each vessel can now be remolded and made new again, to become a beautiful work of mercy prepared unto glory, instead of a vessel of wrath fitted to destruction (see Rom. 9:22-23).

Abiding

"Abide in me, and I in you says the Lord. For only as you abide in me and let me abide in you can you fulfill that which I require. And what does it mean to abide in me? It means to remain in that position in which I have placed you; for it is a place and a position of rest from your own striving, and a place of security from all the devices of the enemy. For I would not have you strive in your own strength, neither would I have you fight your own battles; for I have made provision for you, if you will abide or rest in me, I will protect you and strengthen you, says the Lord.

To abide means to trust. Are you not willing to believe that I have made provision for all that you need to live a victorious and overcoming Christian life? Have I not made known my love to you in that I have given my life for you? If then I have provided for your salvation, am I not able to preserve you and keep you and protect you as you abide and trust in me? For I am your protection and your covering. You have been provided a home, a resting place in me, and as one lies down in rest and security in his physical home, so do I want my people to abide, to rest, and rely on me. For I am your dwelling place. I have made provision for all of your needs, if you wilt put your trust in me, and let me cover you, and protect you.

And if you abide in me, will I not also abide in you? I will take up my abode in you, and through my Word and my Spirit I will remain in you and will perfect myself in you. For I am your life and your strength, but only as I abide in you can I do that which I purpose in your life. Therefore, study my Word, and seek my face daily, spending much time in praise and adoration. For only as you seek me diligently can I fully abide in you to do my perfecting.

And now you can see why I say abide in me and let me abide in you; for this is the secret of the effective and victorious Christian life. For I have made a home for you in me, and this is your protection and security; and I have made my home in you, and this is your strength and vitality. Therefore, see and understand by faith and trust you abide in me, and by my Word and Spirit I

abide in you; both are necessary. For only as you abide in me can I have free reign to abide in you. Abiding in me comes first, and then I can abide in you; for the initiative is with you.

I am able to work in you only to the degree that you submit to, and trust, and rest in me. I have made a home for you in me, but if you do not abide there how can I bring to pass that which I purpose? For when you worry and strive and try to work out everything yourself, and when you try to fight your own battles, you are in effect separating yourself from me, and going outside of that protection and security which I have provided for you. You are exposing yourself to the enemy's attacks, and you are unable to overcome because you are not taking advantage of that which I have provided. When you accepted me, and were born of my Spirit, I placed you in a position of absolute protection from all of the wiles of the enemy; I placed you in me. And do you think that the enemy can get through me? I say not! But when you fail to abide and rest in me in complete confidence and trust, you in effect go outside of me and expose yourself to all of the attacks of the enemy. I am not able to protect you because I must have your cooperation. If you refuse to stay where I have placed you, how can I defend you? If you take things into your own hands, and try to fight the enemy yourself, then I am powerless to come to your aid. It is only as you look to me with complete confidence and faith that I am able to act on your behalf. Therefore, trust me, my people, and abide in that perfect resting place which I have provided. For in me there is complete deliverance and protection from all that the enemy would send against you.

And now consider further, to abide in me is necessary for your protection, but to finish and complete that work which I have begun in you it is necessary for me to abide in you. Now I am perfectly willing to do this, but again I am limited by your willingness to let me abide in you. Only as you study my Word and meditate upon its precepts; only as you spend much time thinking of my ways and praising me with your whole heart, desiring to commune with me at all times, can I truly abide in you as I desire, and perfect my work in you. For if you will truly seek me and commit your ways unto me, I will be faithful to abide in you, and perfect my work in you. You will find that as I am able to abide in you, I am also able to perfect in you all that I am. For I abide in you to impart to you that which is of my own nature; for I would bring into your innermost being my love, my joy, and my peace. I would impart to you that meekness and gentleness which is a part of my being. I would infuse unto you my holiness, and my righteousness, that you might be fully clothed and ready for the wedding which will take place when I gather my own unto myself.

So, my people, will you not learn that which I am seeking to teach you? Abide, do not strive. Trust, do not doubt. Surrender, do not be unyielding. Put your full confidence in me, and find that perfect resting place, and that place of complete protection which I have provided for you. And then let me fully abide in you and possess your every thought and desire. For surely you will find that I am the fullness of your joy, and the fullness of your peace, imparting unto you the fullness of all that I am, and making you into the perfection of my being." (end of prophecy)

Learning To Abide

In John 14:9, Jesus made this astounding statement to His disciples: "He who has seen me has seen the Father." Then He went on to explain this by saying, "Do you not believe that I am IN the Father and the Father is IN me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does the works. Believe me that I am IN the Father, and the Father IN me, or else believe me for the sake of the works themselves." (14:10-11) There was such a union and fusing together of natures (in the harmony of perfect love) that He expressed it by saying that the Father was IN Him, and He was IN the Father. But Jesus went on in that same discourse to explain to the disciples that He was going to make it possible for the same kind of relationship to exist between Himself and them, as He experienced with the Father, and this would be through the ministry and indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. He said He would send the Holy Spirit to abide with them forever, and to dwell in them, and through this indwelling presence, He and the Father would come to them and make their abode (dwelling) with them. Then,

speaking of the Holy Spirit's coming on the day of Pentecost, He said: "At that day you will know that I am in my Father, AND you IN me, and I IN you." (see 14:15-23) In His final prayer before going to the cross, Jesus prayed that as He and the Father are one: "that they may all be one; even AS You, Father, art IN me, and I IN You, that they ALSO may be IN Us. . . I IN them, and You IN me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent me, and have LOVED them, even as You have LOVED me." (John 17:21-23)

One cannot read these passages without realizing that Jesus made it possible for us to have the same kind of oneness and unity with Him, as He had with the Father. Notice that I said the same KIND, not as yet the same DEGREE. We have a long way to go yet before our natures are so fused in unity and oneness with Christ in perfect love that it approaches the degree of unity that exists between the Father and Son. But that is the ultimate goal with time and growth. But NOW, because of the miracle of the "new birth", whereby the very life and presence of Christ is IN us through the Holy Spirit, and we are placed IN Christ, in a new relation of UNITY (fusing together) and family KINSHIP, we can say that "I am in the Father, and the Father in me." I am pointing out these facts in truth as a preparation for some comments on how to ABIDE in Christ more fully. "Abiding" has to do with daily experience in our relation to Christ. But first we must grasp the fact that if we are truly "born of Him" (John 3:3), then we are IN Him and He is IN us. Revelation of fact must precede realization in experience. This is indicated by Paul in his Ephesian letter by his two prayers. In Eph. 1:16-18, he prays that the Ephesian Christians might have the Spirit of revelation to SEE (understand) the truth, and in Eph. 3:14-19, he prays that they might fully experience within themselves what has been revealed to them. By faith we must firmly lay hold of the fact that we are IN Christ (Eph. 1:3,4,6,7,10,11) and Christ is IN us (Col.1:27, Rom. 8:10, II Cor. 13:5), if we belong to Him. Our daily experience may fluctuate, as to whether we are "abiding" in Him or not, but "Nevertheless, the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His," (2 Tim. 2:19). And upon that foundation of fact we can stand in faith, regardless of variations of experience.

But out of faith in fact, comes experience; and this is what the Lord wants; for us to experience daily the reality and blessing of "abiding" in Christ. In John 15:1-16, Jesus makes it clear that the goal and purpose of learning to abide is that FRUIT might be developed and manifested in our lives. "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without me you can do nothing. . . but I chose you, and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain. . . By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be my disciples." (15:4-5, 16, 8) The "fruit" that He desires is given in Gal. 5:22, Eph 5:9, Phil. 1:11, James 3:17-18, Heb. 13:15, etc.

The English word "abide" is a translation of the Greek word meno. But that same Greek word is also translated "continue", "remain", "dwell", and "endure". Only as we examine all of these English words can we grasp the "richness" of the thought that Jesus sought to convey in our "living relationship" with Him in our daily experience. Let me take the word "abide" first, since it is the most frequent translation of meno. The word "abide" is used a number of times in the N. T. to indicate the physical act of staying in a certain home or place. Jesus said to Zacchaeus in Lk. 19:5, "make haste and come down, for today I must stay (abide) at your house." In John 1:38-39 we read about two of John's disciples asking Jesus "where do you dwell?" He says to them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with Him that day." (KJV) In this scripture, the words "dwell", "dwelt" and "abode" are all a translation of the Greek word meno. In Lk. 19:5, Jesus abode in Zacchaeus' house, and in John 1:39, the disciples abode with Jesus in His house or dwelling wherever it was at that time. Here is a beautiful illustration of the truth that when we accept Christ as our Savior and ask Him to come into our lives, He makes His abode or home in us, and we make our abode or home in Him. Whenever you invite someone to stay in your home with you, you usually say, "make yourself at home", because you want them to be relaxed, comfortable and to feel at home. It is possible to stay in a house and yet not "feel at home". With this fact in

mind, let me paraphrase Jesus' statement "Abide in me, and I in you" as follows: "I want you to make yourself at home in me and I want to make myself at home in you." Read that several times until you grasp the stupendous and thrilling fact that we have found a "spiritual home" in Christ, and He has found a "spiritual home" in us, and He wants us to learn to be "at home" in this wonderful living relationship, and this we do by learning to "abide".

Now what does "abiding" mean, and how do we learn to abide? Abiding is first and primarily the REST OF FAITH. It is learning to TRUST the Lord in everything, with complete submission to His will in all aspects and circumstances of life. Jesus began His teaching on these truths by stating: "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in me." (John 14:1) The writer of the Hebrew letter says, "For we who have believed do enter that rest," (4:3). But there are DEGREES and DEPTHS of faith and rest. After calling the disciples to believe and put their trust in Him in John 14:1, Jesus goes on to say, in verse 2: "In my Father's house are many mansions (dwellings); if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you." The word translated "dwellings" in this verse is from the Greek word meno, and is the same word translated "abide" in John 15:4, etc. The King James translation "mansions" is unfortunate, for it obscures the fact that Jesus has prepared many spiritual "abiding places" in Him right here and now, as well as a future home. And as our faith grows and we learn to abide more fully in Him, we increasingly experience more of these abiding places. The places prepared for us in our present spiritual life are described for us in Eph. 2:6: "and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus". . . who has (also) "blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Eph, 1:3) These are the "abiding places", which Christ prepared for us, that where He IS, there we may be also.

Notice that Paul says we have been made to SIT in heavenly places in Christ. This speaks of a position of REST, through faith, where we cease from our own struggles and labors and rest in the vicarious victory of Christ for us, trusting Him to do FOR us and IN us and THROUGH us what we cannot do ourselves, in our own strength or ability. When you go into your home, you sit down in a chair and rest your whole weight on it, trusting the chair completely to hold you. You cease from your own muscular efforts as you commit yourself totally unto the chair and REST. You ABIDE in that chair, even as in our "spiritual home" in Christ, we are to ABIDE in Him through FAITH, "casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you." (1 Pet. 5:7) Take a look at Matt. 11:28-30, where Jesus invites all who will to enter into a two-fold rest. In verse 28 he speaks to those who are "heavy laden" with the burden, guilt and suffering of sin. They can find "rest" through His mercy and deliverance. But then in verse 29, he invites to a further rest. He says, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." Our soul (the mental-emotional nature within) can be filled with much agitation and unrest (worries, anxieties, strivings, etc.) unless we learn to be "yoked" with the Lord in the REST of FAITH (total yielding and dependence upon Him, trusting Him in all of the issues of our life).

This two-fold "rest" offered by Jesus is pictured by type in the O. T. by the journeys of the Israelites. Through the blood of the Passover lamb (Ex. 12), they were delivered from Egypt, and after crossing the Red Sea they "rested" from their past bondages, rejoicing in the Lord's mercy to them; this was their rest FROM something. But the Lord had prepared a land for them to journey to and ENTER INTO as their promised "rest", and this required their crossing another body of water, the Jordan river. Forty years after the deliverance from Egypt, Moses spoke to the children of Israel and said: "for as yet you have not come to the rest and the inheritance which the Lord your God is giving you." (Deut. 12:9) The writer of Hebrews says that God was greatly grieved with them because they would not learn His ways, so He swore they would not enter His rest (3:10-11), and this so clearly corresponds to what Jesus said about this second rest in Mt. 11:29: "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me. . .and you will find rest for your souls." But this unwillingness and failure to learn stemmed basically from a heart of unbelief (see Heb. 3:19, 4:2). They simply would not learn to TRUST the Lord completely, taking him at His WORD, and committing themselves and their destiny totally in His hands, obeying Him even when they did not understand, and knowing that He would not fail them, but would KEEP them in every

circumstance and time of trial. And we too, like the Israelites, will not experience God's two-fold rest for us: both FROM that which would OPPRESS us, and INTO that which will BLESS us, until we learn to ABIDE IN FAITH in the "bosom" of our Savior and Lord, TRUSTING Him in and with every issue of life.

"Abiding" also means a conscious and constant dependence upon the Lord in our daily "walk" before Him. This means cultivating a continual and "living fellowship" with Him whereby we are "in touch" through communion in the Spirit at all times. Jesus emphasized this in John 15:5: "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without me you can do nothing." The branch constantly draws the sustaining and fruit bearing sap from the vine; even so must we draw on the sustaining and imparting grace of the Lord through "loving fellowship" in the Spirit. Paul says in Gal. 5:25, "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." Our power for "walking" uprightly before the Lord and in the sight of men is the enabling of the Spirit, but we draw on this power as we "live" in the Spirit of personal fellowship with the Lord, with a conscious awareness of His presence; with the Spirit of love, praise and adoration springing up within from a joyful heart, communing with Him in the depths of our being as He abides there through the Spirit. In the Song of Solomon, chap. 8:5, this question is asked: "Who is this coming up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?" This is a picture of all who truly want to walk pleasing to the Lord; a recognition that in ourselves we are wholly without strength and need to lean (abide) upon our Beloved Lord. It is a picture of total dependence upon Him, as He leads us through the wilderness and out of the wilderness into the blessings of His promised inheritance. We are "kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." (1 Pet. 1:5)

Jesus' words in John 15:2 indicate that "abiding" also means submitting to His pruning: "and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit." The Lord desires a "bumper" crop of fruit in our lives, as indicated by 15:8: "By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be my disciples." And much fruit can be produced within us only as those things that hinder are "pruned" away. This involves the Lord's dealing with us in many different kinds of situations, as He exposes through testings and provings what is not of Him. As if the macrocosm of the outer world, so in the microcosm of our inner being, God's purpose is to "shake not only the earth (our 'life' actions and conditions), but also heaven (our inner mental-emotional nature)", and this He does so that what can be shaken will be removed (pruned away) and that which cannot be shaken may remain (see Heb. 12:26-27). The word "remain" in this passage is the same Greek word meno, that is the subject of our study. Not only here, but twice in John 15, instead of "abide", the word is translated "remain", to indicate that which is continuous and lasting, in contrast to that which must be "pruned away". Jesus said: "I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain." (15:16) And then He mentions a specific fruit He wants to remain: "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full." (15:11) His fruit increasingly grows and "abides" or "remains" in us as we learn to "abide" in Him, and this means yielding to Him in His dealings, that all hindering vestiges of carnality (the "works of the flesh" – Gal. 5:19-21) may be "pruned" away.

Finally, there can be no complete "abiding" apart from the Word of God. Jesus IS the "living Word" of God (John 1:1, 14, 1 Pet. 1:23). To abide in Him is to abide in His Word, and if He is abiding in us, His words are abiding there also. "You are already clean (purged –pruned) because of the word which I have spoken to you. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. (John 15:3, 7) Here is the KEY to a fruitful prayer life, for this two-fold abiding means attunement, sensitivity, to the "heart-beat" of the Lord, and "this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us." (1 John 5:14) Jesus admonishes us according to the pattern of His own life: "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in His love." (John 15:10) Keeping, or abiding in, His commandments (His Word) cannot be separated from abiding in His love, for if we love Him, we keep His commandments (John 14:15,

21). "As the Father loved me, I also have loved you; abide in my love." (John 15:9) Here the same Greek word meno is translated "abide", and we get the idea, not only of that which abides, lasts and remains (without ceasing or diminishing), but also the idea of progress, growth, and increase. We will continue to grow in His love and His love will continue to grow in us. And this is inextricably connected with the growth in the love of and obedience to His Word, which will increasingly "live" (dwell, abide, remain, continue) in us.

Learning to abide holds a further KEY: that which will prepare us for the "greater works" which Christ promised His church would do (John 14:12). The pattern is founded in Jesus' own life on earth. "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? . . the Father who dwells in me does the works." (John 14:10) The word "dwells" is from the same Greek meno, that has been occupying our attention. The Father in Jesus and He in the Father was not just a fact, but a daily experience in the earthly life of Jesus, as He learned to "live in the Spirit" of that reality through perfect abiding faith, love, obedience, fellowship, yielding; with that perfection being wrought out and manifested in His earthly life through the testing, proving and sufferings He went through (Heb. 2:10, 18, 5:8-9). It was the perfect UNITY with the Father, and the total commitment (without reservation) to the Father's WILL that made possible the giving of the Holy SPIRIT to Him without measure (John 3:34), and by the power of that anointing He performed His mighty works (Lk. 4:18). How much more then do we need to learn to ABIDE in Him, that He might ABIDE in us in the increasing power of His Spirit. John, in his first epistle, says: "the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you," (1 John 2:27). But God's purpose is to increase that anointing, so that a greater measure of the Spirit's power can abide in and manifest through vessels He is preparing. In 1 John 4:13, we read: "By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit." But surely a greater measure OF that Spirit is needed if we (as the spiritual Body of Christ) are going to do greater works than Jesus did.

In John 6:56, Jesus gives a further insight into the fusion that is needed as expressed by the Greek meno; and both here and in ***1 John 4:13*** just quoted the word is rendered by "abide". "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him." To "eat His flesh" is to receive and masticate and absorb His Word into our inner being, so that it becomes "life" in us by the Spirit (see John 6:63), and "written upon the fleshly tables of our heart (see 2 Cor. 3:3). To "drink His blood" means to imbibe His Spirit (see ***John 8:37-39, 1 Cor. 12:13***) until we are so filled and controlled by it that we increasingly take on His nature, and live as He lived. John declares "He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked." (1 John 2:6). The question is: how much are we willing to become a part of Him, and let Him become a part of us, until there is an "atomic fusion" (abiding in Him and He in us) so that POWER can be released by the Spirit, and then "greater works than these shall you do" (John 14:12). And the "heart-beat" of this increasing "fusion" with the Lord is divine LOVE, shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, (Rom. 5:5). "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him". (1 John 4:16).

The Greek word meno is used a number of times in the epistle of 1 John, and is translated "abide" (2:6, 10, 14, 17, 24, 27, 28, 3:6, 14, 15, 24), "dwell" (3:17, 24, 4:12, 13, 15, 16), "continue" (2:19, 24), and "remain" (2:24, 3:9). Three of these words are used in 2:24: "Let that therefore abide in you, which you have heard from the beginning. If that which you have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, you also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father." (KJV) I cannot take the time here to go into all these scriptures, but if you will study them in the light of what has been taught in this article, you will find much to meditate on. "And now, little children, ABIDE in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. . .but he who does the will of God ABIDES forever." (1 John 2:28, 17)

"Abiding in Him" is the objective phase of our union in Christ; "His abiding in us" is the subjective phase. They are inseparable. But if we will concentrate on the objective, He will take care of the subjective. If we will "make ourselves at home in Him," He will have no trouble in "making Himself at home" in us. So REST in the Lord; cast your whole self on Him and begin to enjoy His fellowship; "snuggle up" and begin to "gurgle" the praises of your Lord. Visualize yourself as being IN Him as your spiritual home: in His protection, care, and love, with all the

provision that a home implies.

"And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever." (***John 8:35***)

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." (***Psalm 23:6***)

Thank you for reading and applying this principle of abiding in Christ. Please contact us with any questions or comments.

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